

Agenda Item No. 4(c)

DERBYSHIRE COUNTY COUNCIL

**MEETING OF CABINET MEMBER – HIGHWAYS, TRANSPORT AND
INFRASTRUCTURE**

11 March 2021

Report of the Director - Economy, Transport and Environment

**INITIATING FEASIBILITY STUDIES FROM CHALLENGE FUND
RESERVES**

(1) **Purpose of Report** To seek Cabinet Member approval to draw down funding from Challenge Fund Reserves to commission and undertake two feasibility studies:

- Potential Derwent Valley Cycle Route; and
- Improving access to Shirebrook

(2) **Information and Analysis** This report sets out the case for initiating two studies into potential infrastructure projects relating to specific challenges within the broad context of economic recovery and 'good growth'.

Project 1: Potential Derwent Valley Cycle Route

The Derwent Valley is an internationally important destination, both in terms of its industrial history and as an area of spectacular scenery. Its proximity to employment growth areas in Derby, and the string of market towns and villages along the valley offers significant 'active travel' and sustainable development potential for local people and tourists to the area.

Led by the Derwent Valley Trust, plans for an attractive cycle route for both leisure and commuter use along the Derwent Valley have been drawn up (see Appendix 1 for more details).

This route has potential to connect Derby to the Peak District cycle network, the start of the Monsal Trail and an extensive and developing network of routes for cycle tourism, including Routes 6 and 54 of the National Cycle Network. If implemented, the project would showcase an important area of industrial heritage and natural beauty, as well as offering significant economic potential by opening up cycle/pedestrian access to local housing and employment sites. The key objective of the proposed route is to connect local communities and visitor destinations throughout the corridor and link to a range of wider cycling and walking routes across the County.

The proposed cycle route sits within the scope of the Derwent Valley Corridor programme and offers potential to effect modal shift in line with the 'Hierarchy of Travel' methodology, i.e. encouraging residents, commuters and visitors to swap carbon heavy modes of private transport to more sustainable forms of travel (bus, rail, cycling etc). It also complements the emerging ambitions to ensure the long term, sustainable future of the Derwent Valley Mills World Heritage Site as part of the wider Corridor programme, ultimately contributing to good growth and sustainable tourism in the area.

However, in developing the County's Key Cycle Network it was identified that any proposed Derwent Valley route comes with a range of significant challenges and issues to be addressed. It is therefore proposed to commission an appropriate feasibility study to help understand the size and scale of these challenges, assess how they could be addressed and prepare a range of fully costed proposals to help assess overall viability of the route.

Initial scoping of the feasibility study would suggest a two phase approach as follows:

1. Phase 1 – Commission a route option assessment broken down into specific phases, identifying issues and range of potential options; and
2. Phase 2 – Engaging a team of engineering consultants to draw up specific, fully costed plans based on the findings of Phase 1 (above).

Project 2: Improving Access to Shirebrook

Highway connectivity in and around Shirebrook is a long-standing issue. Although the town is served by the Robin Hood rail line which provides reasonable connectivity to destinations north and south, no principle roads run through the town. In addition, although neither the M1 Motorway nor larger settlements in the Mansfield/Ashfield area are far from Shirebrook, these journeys are relatively convoluted.

In the past, consideration has been given to new highway connections to Shirebrook in association with a bypass of Glapwell in some form. Such a project remains feasible in principle, although it faces substantial environmental challenges and it is questionable whether the scale and impact of the solution are proportionate to the problem being solved. Therefore, whilst this remains an option, it is proposed that a review is undertaken to confirm the issues and opportunities apparent in the locality, rather than any assumed solution. A first phase of work would therefore encompass:

- Assessment of regeneration (good growth) potential and barriers (in conjunction with Bolsover District Council and links to Local Plan).
- Access to employment and skills for Shirebrook residents.
- Current challenges facing bus services.

These will largely be carried out by a partnership team of officers with no immediate requirement to draw upon the Challenge Fund budget. The findings of this first phase of work would essentially provide a gateway review to the potential second phase which would take place if access is identified as a critical constraint to growth. Phase two would comprise the commissioning of studies into potential transport or mobility options. It is proposed that the 'gateway review' after Phase one be carried out through a further report to the Cabinet Member.

(3) **Financial Considerations** It is estimated a maximum of £100,000 from Challenge Fund reserves will be required to undertake the work described above on the Potential Derwent Valley Cycle Route and £150,000 for Improving Access to Shirebrook. The Derbyshire Challenge Fund was established by Cabinet on 22 October 2013 (Minute No.288/13 refers), initially focussed upon 'invest to save' initiatives but which can provide one-off support for potential projects.

(4) **Environmental Considerations** These two projects are being developed on the basis of 'good growth' principles and any assessment of issues and solutions will have full regard to climate change and low carbon options.

(5) **Other Considerations**

In preparing this report the relevance of the following factors has been considered: legal, prevention of crime and disorder, equality and diversity, human resources, health, property, social value and transport considerations.

(6) **Key Decision** No.

(7) **Call-in** Is it required that call-in be waived in respect of the decisions proposed in the report? No.

(8) **Background Papers** Held on file within the Economy, Transport and Environment Department.

(9) **OFFICER'S RECOMMENDATIONS** That the Cabinet Member:

9.1 Approves the release of funding, up to a maximum of £100,000, from Challenge Fund Reserves to commission and undertake a feasibility study on the potential Derwent Valley Cycle Route.

9.2 Approves the release of funding from the Challenge Fund Reserves, up to a maximum of £150,000, to undertake studies into Improving Access to Shirebrook, to be released subject to a gateway review of the first phase of work and a further report to the Cabinet Member.

- 9.3 Agrees to receive further reports detailing the outcome of these studies and proposing any further stages of work.

Tim Gregory
Director - Economy, Transport and Environment

